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The “Bob Pierleoni Spirit of POD Award”

In 1990, a great many POD Network members were saddened by the news that a colleague, friend, and long-time POD member, Robert Pierleoni, (Bob to most of us) had suffered a fatal heart attack. While Bob had served on the CORE Committee two terms, and had been Co-chair of the Delavan, Wisconsin, conference at Lake Lawn Lodge in 1985, and had been a loyal member from early years, the loss of his presence in POD was one felt keenly as a result of something that many of his friends referred to as his “spirit” of being a “POD’er”. He was a sharing, caring kind of person who cheerfully volunteered for needed tasks whether there would recognition for his contribution or not. He was the kind of person who personifies the nature of this field of faculty development in a very real way.

It was with this sense, that the CORE Committee, in 1991, established the “Bob Pierleoni Spirit of POD Award” to commemorate the supportive, giving attitude so important to POD and to this field. It was first awarded posthumously to Robert Pierleoni as the first recipient at the 1991 POD Network Conference in Morgantown, West Virginia. It was graciously received by Maryann Pierleoni for her late husband.

The POD Network has not been an organization which confers awards to competing people or programs; rather it has emphasized the collaborative nature of our group. This award is not a competitive one. There are no objective criteria to measure one person against another. Rather, it is an award which is to be given, not annually, but only on an occasional basis to a person who has exemplified the intangible, “Spirit of POD” which is difficult to describe, but which we all know when we encounter it.

It was in this context that the “Spirit of POD Award Committee” deliberated whether 1992 was a year that this award should be given. It was decided that there was a clearly deserving person in our midst. The committee unanimously agreed that Marilla Svinicki should be the second recipient of this award. At the Saddlebrook conference, the beautiful celestite crystal, designed by Linc Fisch to be a unique award, was given to Marilla.

The editors invited Marilla to share her special insights with the reader about her interpretation of the “Spirit of POD”. Her words help POD to further expand and review the nature of being a POD member. Marilla has served on the CORE Committee, two years as Executive Director (1987-1989), and as Conference Co-Chair in 1987. She is Editor for the “Teaching Excellence” series, and has contributed to most of the POD Committees. Dan Wheeler, 1992-1993 Executive Director, in presenting the award, pointed out that Marilla’s commitment, enthusiasm, ability to listen, and willingness to share expertise extend far beyond the requirements of offices she held. She is one of the POD members who “provides the ‘glue’ to make POD the community it is today.”